

The Weather Whisper

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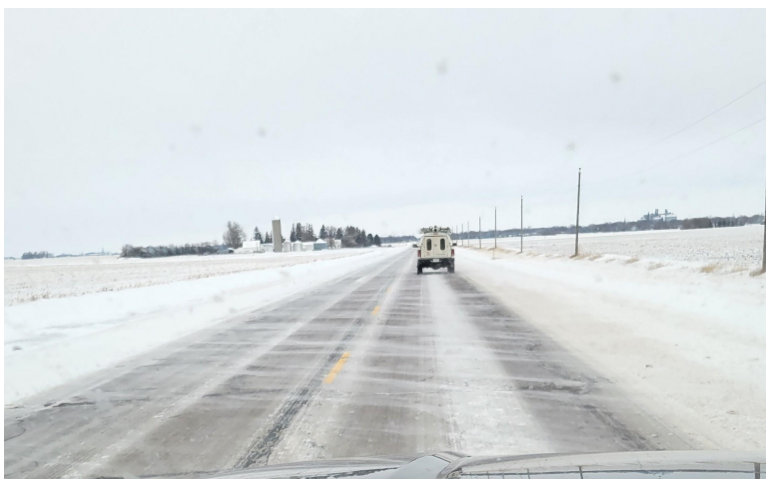
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Day in the Life: Electronics Technician Pt. 2

Joe Price, Electronics Technician

No one ever knows exactly what a day in the life of an Electronics Technician for the National Weather Service (NWS) will look like. It could be changing light bulbs at the office or racing to an ASOS to repair a down system.

One such day came early in January of this year, requiring dashing through the snow for a repair in one of our furthest locations - Estherville, Iowa. The hope for that day was to be in the office, away from the cold that often settles into Iowa around that time of year. That plan changed though when Chad and I came in to find an ASOS rain gauge heater had quit working.



Icy road conditions that day on the way to Estherville due to blowing snow.

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With marching orders, we packed the truck and ventured off into the north for another great adventure. It was clear that day, but cold and windy. The last week had provided a broad spectrum of temperatures with various forms of precipitation. It was just as bright as it was cold that morning with a white landscape that came with the fresh snow. A morning that sunglasses were needed to survive.

Upon arriving at the airport, we realized that driving out to the ASOS was not an option. The snow was deep and the wind had packed it hard enough to walk on but not drive. Off on foot we went, to find the missing heat the rain gauge so desperately needs. Without it, the snow that lands in its catch basin will never melt and tip the mechanism it uses for its measurements.

After making some snow angels we found the culprit, a melted wire! Apparently, the cold weather up in that area had been too much for the wire that supplies power to the heating element inside the rain gauge. After a few minutes we had a new wire to the tipping bucket rain gauge to keep it warm and we were back to the truck with the heater on HIGH! Just another day in the life of an Electronics Technician in WFO Des Moines.



Above: Electronics Technician Chad Curtis dashing through the snow and back to the truck after an initial assessment of the ASOS tipping bucket rain gauge.



Left: Electronics Technician Chad Curtis replacing the wire to the rain gauge heater...after a few snow angels!

A Visit with the Iowa DOT

Roger Vachalek, Lead Meteorologist

Several staffers from our office visited the Iowa Department of Transportation's Traffic Management Center (TMC) on November 3rd. What is the Traffic Management Center? The TMC is the nerve center for monitoring traffic along Iowa Interstates and major highways and is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Here staff watch traffic patterns and flow to assist motorists and safety personnel with emergency responses for crashes or breakdowns. When a crash or vehicle stall interrupts normal travel throughout Iowa, the TMC works with law enforcement and DOT personnel such as Highway Helper to assist at the scene, including medical transfers and clearing the road for normal travel as quickly as possible. The TMC is also responsible for changing the signage along area interstates that alerts travelers to road work, road closures, crashes and potential travel impacts due to weather.



NWS Des Moines staff visiting the TMC operations area.

That's where the National Weather Service comes in. Our office works with the TMC to discuss how the NWS can assist the TMC in getting out the best message during poor travel weather, like the upcoming winter travel season. In-person partner meetings help not only the DOT snow plow response, but also the Iowa State Patrol and most importantly – all of us here in Iowa that rely on the interstates and highways to bring us safely to our destinations. Each winter season, the NWS in Des Moines provides pre and during-storm briefings for winter storms, which helps the TMC determine signage messaging in areas affected by poor winter travel conditions.

Travelers also need to react appropriately for winter weather as well – and that's where you come in. Slow down in ice and snow and don't crowd the plow! Last year there were a number of plow-vehicle crashes during plowing operations. The goal this year is to lessen that occurrence through better understanding of plowing operations. The plows are driving slower than most of us, so be extra cautious when traveling behind a plow and be mindful of surrounding traffic patterns.

The National Weather Service, Iowa Department of Transportation, law enforcement officers, and you, are all in this together. Let's keep Iowa roads as safe as possible this winter season.

Winter Weather Media Workshop

Brooke Hagenhoff, Lead Meteorologist

Earlier this month, broadcast meteorologists from stations across central Iowa gathered at NWS Des Moines for an afternoon workshop focused on winter weather impacts in Iowa. Topics ranged from the science behind forecasting precipitation type and snow-to-liquid ratios to how best to communicate forecast uncertainty and sharing information between the NWS and media partners. It was an opportunity to strengthen relationships amongst partners and nerd out a bit as fellow meteorologists. The success of workshops like this are a testament to the great relationships amongst stations and with us at the NWS. It takes solid relationships and mutual understanding to work well together in order to deliver the best information possible to those that need it when Iowa weather decides to get active. We're grateful to be in this position and working with some of the best!

At the end of the day we all walked away prepared for winter. Are you?

Third Grade Classes Visit NWS

Brooke Hagenhoff, Lead Meteorologist

This month 3rd grade classes from Karen Acres Elementary School in Urbandale visited NWS Des Moines. While here, students learned about how to take weather observations like temperatures and precipitation, learned about all of the data used to create a forecast, and received a tour of our operations.



On the Cover: Backyard of WFO DMX after the first measurable snow of the season which occurred on Nov. 25, 2023. Snowfall totals from this event included 2.5" at the Des Moines Airport, 1.5" at our office in Johnston, and 2.0" in Waterloo. Photo taken by Ashley Bury.



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